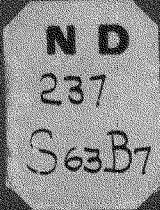


A Brief Sketch
OF THE
Life of Mary Smith,
THE
Painter.

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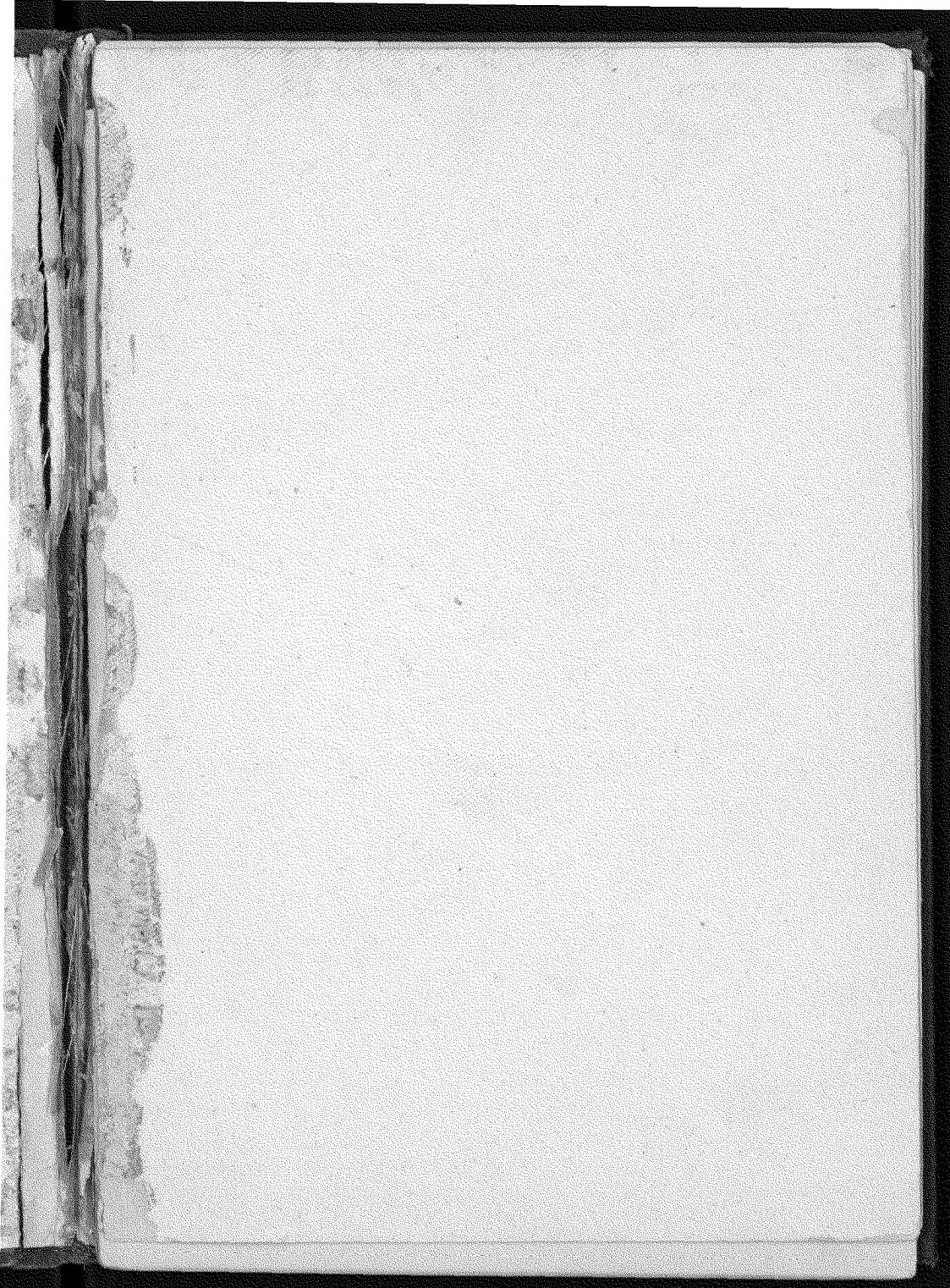
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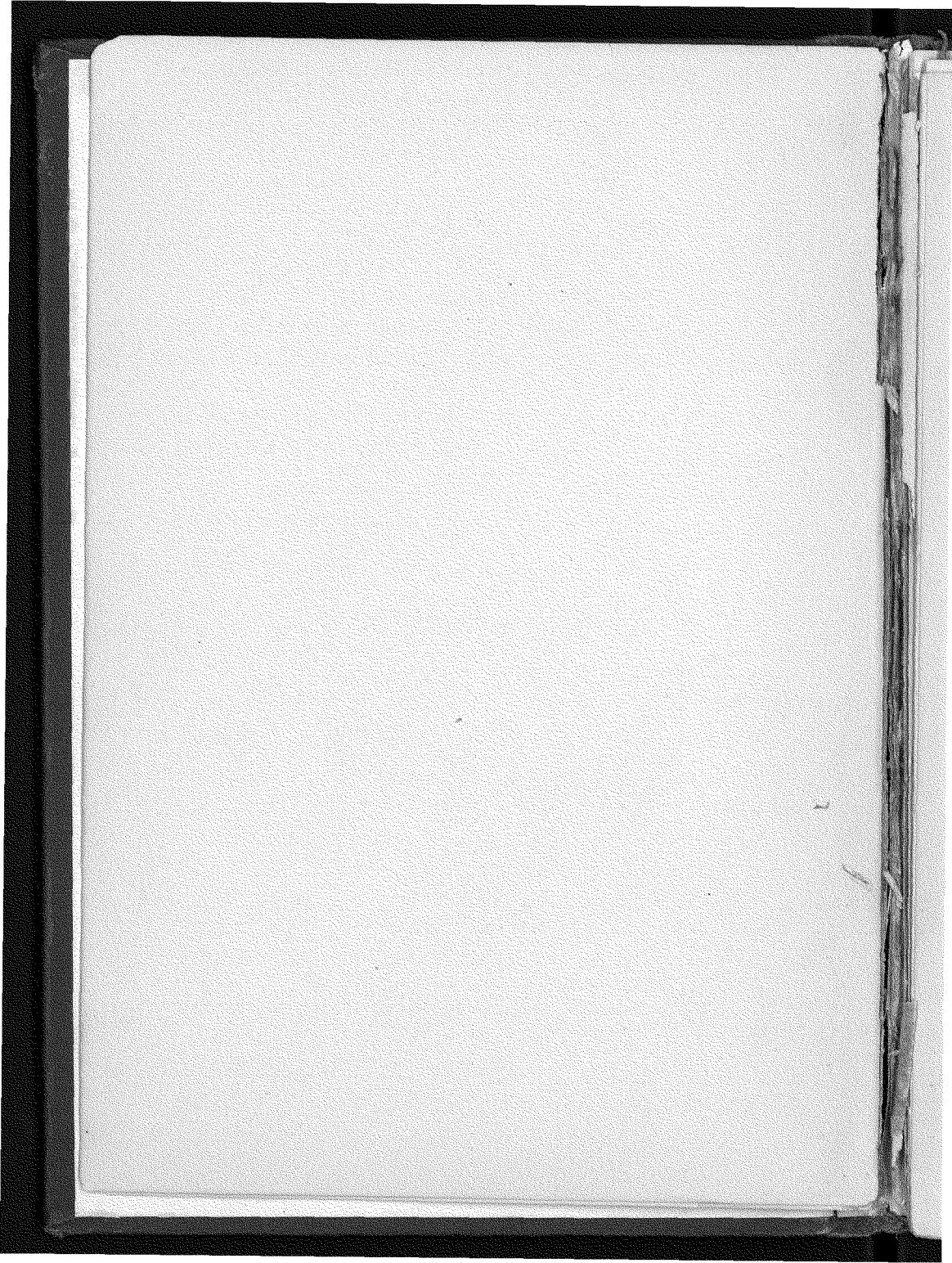
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A BRIEF SKETCH

" OF THE

LIFE OF MARY SMITH,

THE

PAINTER.

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE DISTRIBUTION.



PHILADELPHIA

PRESS OF J. B. LIPPINCOTT & CO.

1878.

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She was born at Rockhill, six miles north of
ing application to a difficult and ennobling pursuit.
those depending on her, combined with unanswer-
feminine devotion to the comfort and happiness of
may have value as the sketch of a life of true
from much society, or even from its method; it
adventure, or the enlivening anecdotes derived
interest afforded by the incidents of travel and
written. Although it can lay no claim to the
brief memorial of the late Mary Smith has been
left of its character; and, therefore, the following
by such an example, that some record should be
already done, but for that which may be inspired
proper, not only in recognition of the good work
cellence has been untimely terminated, it seems
When a life of more than usual ability and ex-

MARY SMITH.

16.9.1911

Philadelphia, in 1842, and, like many who became successful artists, very early manifested a strong inclination to draw and paint. She was a happy child, always self-reliant, and finding occupation and amusement for herself summer and winter in the woods, fields, and garden; and with chickens, birds, and various young animals as constant companions and playmates. A lady recently said, "I remember little Mary when about five years old, dressed in a blue woollen plaid frock, long boots, and mittens, trudging through the snow in the woods with her little dog 'Tarry' as her only companion. This was a sport she enjoyed very much, and as she could distinguish and name many of the forest-trees at that early age, it showed an intelligent observation of her surroundings."

Such habits in early life no doubt laid the foundation of that strong love of nature that was more a passion than a predilection, and remained the ruling principle of her life and art. A love of the beautiful, too, was very early shown in the habit of collecting all interesting objects to be found in

her rambles; and she would often sit by the hour alone in some shady nook with a quantity of flowers about her, striving in many ways to get together a group that pleased her, and then holding it up high would sing as if in triumph at the achievement. And in long winter evenings, sitting in her high chair, she tried to draw and color whatever had interested her most during the day, till tired and drowsy with the day's exercise and exposure in the fresh air, she would fall sound asleep over her funny scrawl. By the time she was eight years old she could make a very good drawing for a child, as a number extant will show; and when travelling in Europe with her parents, in her ninth and tenth years, she made many little sketches in color of whatever impressed itself strongly on her young mind of the day's incidents, or curious characters observed. Among these are represented a gayly-dressed lady at the piano, a procession of Swiss peasants entering a church, Welsh women in blue cloaks, with large white caps under men's hats, driving pigs to market; and there is a very good one of a little Welsh girl

with a queer dog that walked with her over the mountains near Snowdon. Others still preserved, and highly finished, are painted on small white pebbles picked up on the shore of the Mediterranean; one of these gives a half-length of an Italian count, and is full of character. They are all seemingly inspired by the subjects, and not, as is so often the case, done with the desire of making a picture. She never seemed to care about copying a drawing, pattern, or any engraving. Anything short of actual nature possessed no interest for her as a subject to work upon. No doubt, however, the many long hours spent in the great galleries abroad had an influence on her mind, and stored it with many beautiful forms and arrangements of color and effect that would seek expression in some mode, and none so likely as through the pencil and brush, which were in constant use by the rest of the family.

She never went to school, but her mother, who was capable, and delighted in teaching her, gave her a thoroughly good English education at home, with careful training in all domestic affairs; and

being an excellent painter of flowers she was also an important example to her in art.

She was not an extensive reader, but Hume's History of England and Sir Walter Scott's novels were her favorite books; and as she had a good memory, she was familiar with the chief incidents and characters described in those works, and ready to give an explanation in any doubtful circumstance that happened to come under discussion.

At the age of fourteen, when it seemed desirable to do something in earnest as a life pursuit, she began to paint in oil colors, and soon with so much success that her parents thought it at last advisable to encourage her to make it a profession. From this time forward her pictures were admired and purchased as fast as she could produce them, until her final illness and death, which seemed the more sad in thus cutting short what promised to be a fortunate future.

She did not give much time to society. Living in the country, she would find few that could sympathize with her in her aims; and being of an active disposition, and needing relief from long

sedentary occupation, she delighted in the cultivation of a flower and vegetable garden, and with well-known success.

The rearing of large flocks of poultry was another habit; and as she always painted from the life, and would have at all seasons of the year her basket of chicks hanging on her easel, it required skill and constant attention. Squirrels, rabbits, opossums, birds, and other denizens of the wood she kept, too, and their feeding and the observation of their habits were constant sources of pleasure. Ground squirrels she had in her painting "shop" (as she called it), and while sitting long quietly at her work, she would be amused to see the little fellows carry all her seed corn across the room to the wood-box and there hide it; and on the following day, placing the wood on the other side of the room, the busybodies would set to work patiently and carry all the corn to the new hiding-place.

She liked much to ramble in the woods about her home, finding, generally, something to aid her in her pictures; and her attendant on such

occasions would frequently be a splendid favorite chicken, who crowed loud and often, and seemed proud to have his mistress in charge. Her flock were well cared for, and they knew their best friend, for whenever she came near them they crowded so densely about her that she could scarcely move in any direction. This was their return for careful attention during illness from "pip" or accidents, and for an ample hot dinner cooked for them every day in winter. Such habits might not be understood by some; but to those who know how difficult it is to excel in an original walk in art, they showed that her whole soul was in it, and there is no surer indication of finally achieving success.

On looking at a number of her paintings we are struck with the prominent sense of beauty always exhibited in the subject, the accessory features, the brilliancy of light and warm sunny glow of color. All who love nature have delightful associations with young chicks, ducks, and guineas; with wild flowers, turtles, and toadstools in the wood; with rabbits and squirrels, mossy rocks and old mould-

ering stumps; with cherries, wild strawberries, chestnuts, and acorns,—and some of these, with a cool spring, a bit of sunny sky seen through a branch or a clambering vine, are the constant sources of her inspiration, and the sure harbingers of a beautiful painting, for the genius that loved to dwell on these natural unsophisticated sources of beauty, could also penetrate the mysteries of a wonderful but too little understood art. Many admirers of her pictures seemed to have the idea that their fine effect was the result of a kind of good luck or happy chance; but the skilful artist can readily see that in the disposition of the various features of her works, so as to get good grouping, harmony of lines, well-arranged masses of light and shade, breadth of warm and cold color, and a proper concentration of power in the chief group, there is consummate knowledge shown of the various resources of the art.

There probably never was a painter less indebted to the productions of other artists. She never at any time in her life copied a picture. There was no one in this country working in the same walk

during the twenty years of her practice, nor had there ever been; and if any were producing the same kind of subjects abroad, their pictures were not bought and brought to this country. The portrait painter occasionally sees a fine Stuart, a Sully, or an Inman, and greatly to his advancement, even if he should not attempt to copy their manner. And so all other artists are much benefitted by the study of fine works in their respective walks. But she had no such help; her subjects and their style of treatment were entirely the product of her own genius, and the constant study of nature. In the art capitals abroad, where a superior standard of criticism prevails, this originality would give a high rank to its possessor, and in time, no doubt, it will do so here.

It is not uncommon for amateurs and painters of means to surround themselves with many elegant conveniences and a great variety of colors and brushes, such as the shops of Paris furnish to artists. Her material and practice were very different, and very simple. Unlike most painters, she painted with a south light, and liked for the

walls of her room the unplastered and unpainted wood and stone, which, decorated as they were with trophies from the surrounding woods, furnished agreeable natural hues for the eye to rest on while at work. The three—red, yellow, and brown—earths, with black and white, and a little blue, etc., half a dozen well-worn brushes, linseed oil, an old palette and little pine easel made up her outfit, which was handy, and easily taken wherever she desired to work, in-doors or out. As she advanced she acquired facility of method and execution, but would not relax her striving after further excellence. Not content with the day's labor, she would rig up a large lamp on winter nights and make careful life-size studies from an old hen, a handsome pullet, or a lordly "rooster;" and it required no little perseverance and a determined will, with occasionally a rap with the mahl-stick, to make them even tolerable sitters; but the result was always a most masterly piece of life and chicken character. On one occasion, when the sitter was shown his portrait, he at once made, with bill and spur, a most determined assault upon

it, and the study still shows the gashes about the head, made while the paint was soft.

Whenever she walked she was constantly on the lookout for happy effects, or combinations of color and light and shade in flowers and weeds, moss and bark, birds' nests, animals and insects, and such other natural objects as may be come upon in the woods; and if anything more than usually beautiful caught her attention she at once, on returning, set it down in colors on scraps of paper or canvas, two or three inches square, for future suggestions in composing a picture. A great number of these were found after her death stowed away in her painting-room, many of them exceedingly beautiful, and such as artists delight to look upon, recognizing in them the foreshadowings of future beautiful pictures. An album, given her when quite young, in which she was to insert extracts of poetry and sentiment, and in which she never wrote a word, she filled entirely with beautiful finished portraits in water colors of the various insects that frequent this region in summer. Her writing she reserved for carefully-kept accounts,

letters, and a journal reaching over some fifteen years, containing much of her experience of the habits of birds, chickens, and the small animals of the wood, or remarkable incidents in their lives, and sketches of old-time characters that belonged formerly to almost all rural neighborhoods, but are now seldom seen; as also much of the phenomena of colors—light and effect—that are more especially interesting to the painter, and which would have been more than usually interesting on account not only of the freshness of the field observed, but from a happy power she possessed of putting incidents in their most striking lights. This she unfortunately destroyed a few weeks previous to her death. On serious regrets being expressed at her having done so, she said that what she had written for the entertainment of her own family might, if preserved, some day have other readers who would not interpret it so favorably, and therefore she had decided to destroy it.

But to speak of her as an artist only would be neglecting what was equally characteristic of her life, and which would, perhaps, be thought the

most valuable side of her character. She was well trained in all domestic affairs, and, after her mother's death, a most efficient manager of her father's household, as also of her own business, and the duties thrust upon her as secretary of a benevolent society; qualities understood and better appreciated by her neighbors and near friends than were the more unusual attributes of a fine artist, and all carried on, too, with a pleasant cheerfulness, so unlike the air of business and bustle often assumed where so much is done.

She was fastidious about her work being quite up to her capacity, and would, after spending many days upon a painting, think it faulty in arrangement or effect and paint it out. Two of these, covered up entirely with a priming of white lead, have since been recovered by careful washing with spirits of turpentine; they are good pictures, and not at all injured, which speaks well for the solidity of her colors.

Numerous applications have been made since her death for pictures, but these two, and the few she had presented to her family, are all that are

left, and of course cannot be disposed of. Two hundred and eighty-two pictures, their size, subject, and who painted for, are carefully recorded. But there must have been not less than three hundred in all painted during her short life.

She was about the average height and weight, but had a larger head than usual, with a frank, open, clear, gray eye, a slightly tapering lower face, and a small mouth, expressive of great refinement and decision. With the exception of an occasional headache, which was inherited, she enjoyed uniform good health. She had a lively sense of humor, which was often shown in the naming of her pictures; for, while she gave a seemingly appropriate title to the subject, it suggested to the mind something so totally different that it was sure to provoke laughter in the spectator, and put him at once in kindly sympathy with the work.

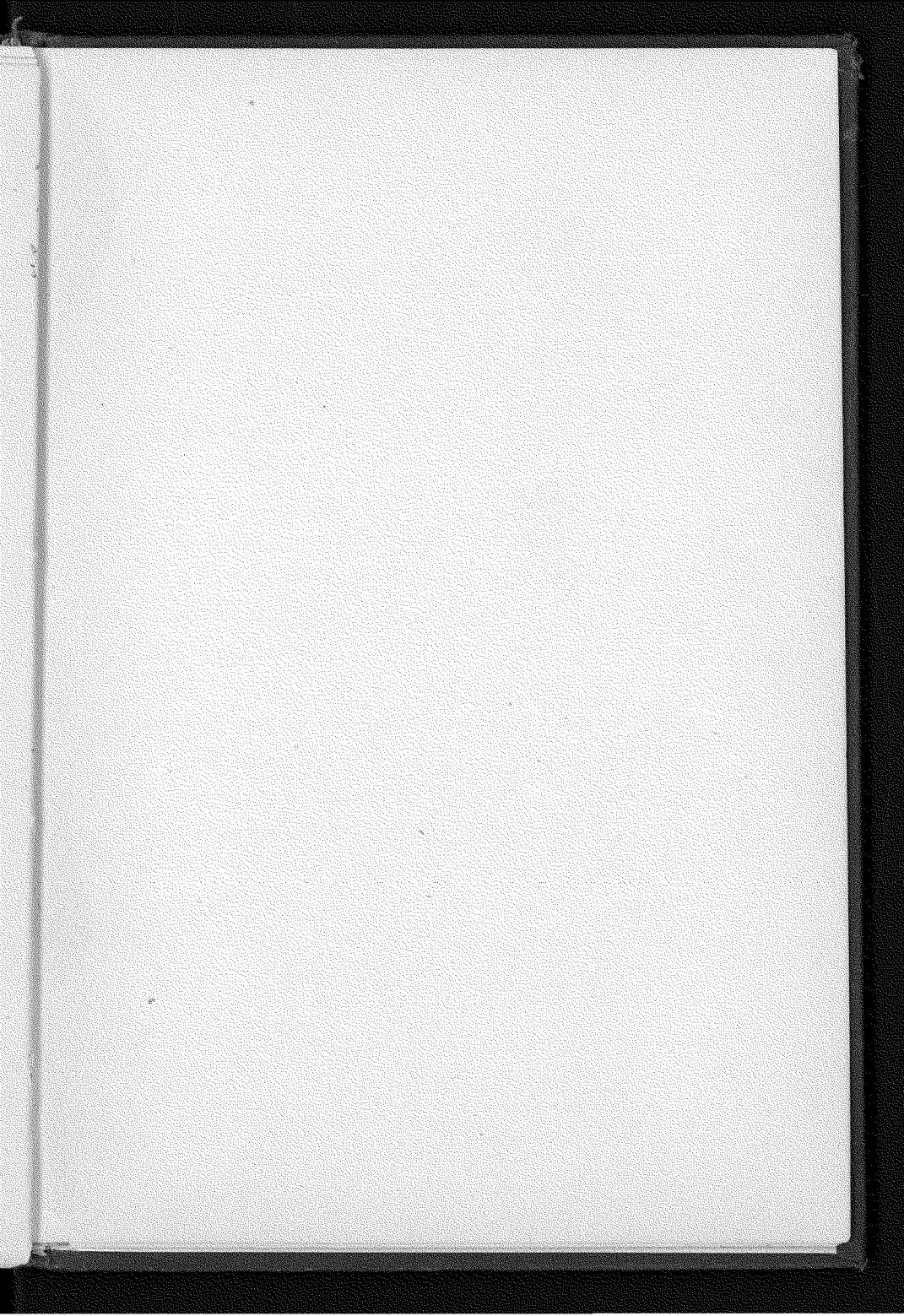
What she earned she disposed of freely for benevolent and useful enterprises. She was, like all right-minded women of her neighborhood, an active agent in raising stores for the Sanitary

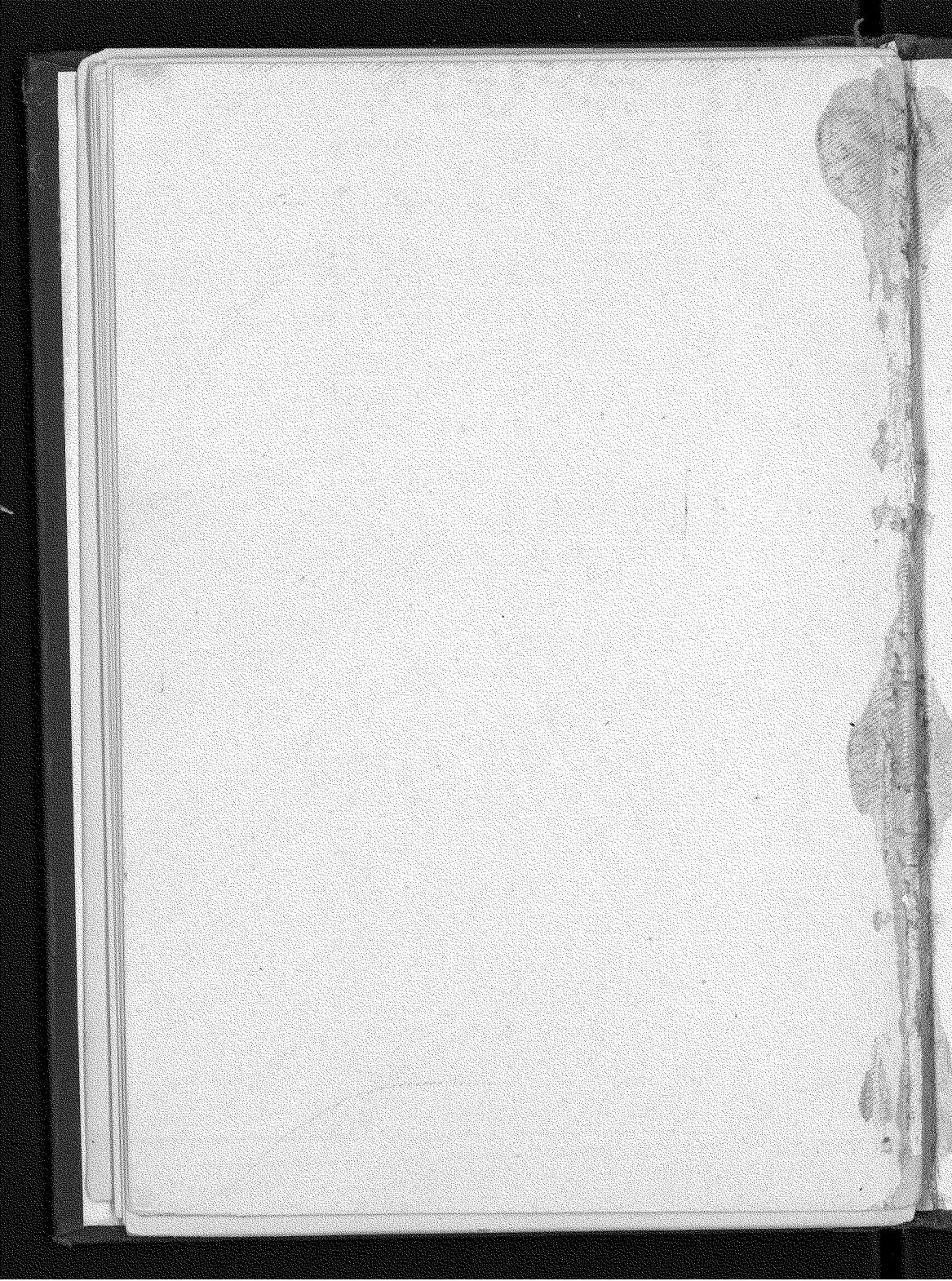
Commission and hospitals during the war; and whenever a picture could be turned to good advantage it was gladly given to aid any good and useful work. Seeing that there was a want of encouragement of home talent in art in Philadelphia, although several young ladies have shown superior abilities, she finally desired that a portion of her earnings should be permanently invested in such manner as to yield an annual income of one hundred dollars, this to be awarded by each year's Exhibition Committee of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts for the best picture in oil or water colors exhibited and painted by a resident lady artist of Philadelphia. This was a sensible and a liberal thing to do, considering the smallness of her means; but it was befitting her character, and like all she did in her too short life. A medical friend, who knew her well, has said that her preponderance of brain and strong will, urging incessant application, impaired her digestion and nutrition, and caused the gastric derangement that finally carried her off.

This brief notice cannot better be closed than

by inserting the following remarks, written by an eminent professional friend, who had observed her from her infancy :

“ Miss Mary, although scarcely at the prime of life in point of years, had very early reached, in character, in genius, and in deserved reputation as an artist, the mature and elevated fame that belongs to the climax of human existence. Thoughtful and modest, with such inward natural resources as yielded content and happiness to herself and those about her, the artist-child and woman had emulated the refined example of her parents in their quiet rural and beautiful home; and so gently girl-like were her manners and her thoughts, that we could not realize that she had in reality reached over thirty years of age; yet the intelligence of her mind and the practical usefulness of her life would suggest maturity and wisdom.”





IN MEMORIAM.

MARY SMITH.

It is perhaps a poor privilege to grieve with friends in deep sorrow, when we estimate their affliction as being beyond our power to offer comfort or consolation, and it is in this sense that we must regard the recent death of Miss MARY SMITH, only daughter of Russell Smith, the artist, announced on the 7th instant.

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It was the interesting privilege of the writer to witness the earliest efforts of little Mary Smith as a natural artist. Inspired at first by her great love for her brood of young chickens, the feeding and watching of which seemed her constant and greatest enjoyment in early childhood. In this voluntary pursuit she was much alone in her contracted poultry-yard, and it was there that the first proof of her inborn and unaided genius, as an infant artist, was found by her brother, and brought to their parents. This was the attempted portrait of a young chick, both artistic and a likeness spite of the rough and insufficient materials with which the child had worked. The discovery led to a supply of pencils and other artist tools, and also to such lessons as she would now and then accept. But the loving devotion to young chicks and inborn art proclaimed themselves in unison, and remained faithful to one another for many years. Among the very early pictures of this gifted child is that of two bantams, the original of which had been presented to her.

It is scarcely possible to do justice to such a life and character as belonged to Mary Smith. Those who are most familiar with her virtues and talents are now silent by sorrow, and must accept the imperfect expression of friends who loved and admired her. These friends know the natural objects and affections that surrounded her early life and endured to its end, and how well calculated they were to produce an open simplicity of character, a love of truth in its every aspect, and influence her progress to success as an artist in the line she had chosen. Mary's moral and intellectual cultivation kept pace and was in beautiful harmony with her artistic nature.

G.

